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Bildung und Geschlechter-gerechtigkeit

Aus dem Inhalt:

- Gender in historischer und systematischer Perspektive
- Gender-Mainstreaming und Gender-Training
- Menschenrecht auf Bildung und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit

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Robert Connell

Boys, masculinities and curricula

The construction of masculinity in practice-oriented subjects[1]

Abstract: The author sees „gender" as a system built up by social relationships. Every change of a small detail of the gender concepts leads inevitably to the change of another. New forms of gender, which have already developed are fighting with the old ones and have already shifted the system. Schools and society intervened a long time ago in favour of new demanded concepts on feminity and manliness. Parents, teachers, the society – all wonder how a gender curriculum for the classroom liberating boys from 'the box'of the old gender domination and enabling girls to develop democratic gender relationships could look like. The author talks about existing research of 'manliness', about the development of boys and the system of gender materialisation in schools and then outlines advises for redefined gender curricula.

Zusammenfassung: Der Autor versteht 'Gender' als ein System sozialer Beziehungen. Jede Veränderung einer Facette von Gender zieht die einer anderen nach sich. Neue Genderformen sind längst da, streiten mit den alten Mustern und haben das System bereits verrückt. Schule und Gesellschaft haben längst zugunsten neuer, geforderter Weiblichkeit- und Männlichkeitsmuster eingegriffen. Eltern, Lehrer, die Gesellschaft, alle fragen sich, wie ein Gender Curriculum im Klassenraum aussehen kann, das Jungen aus ‚der Box' des alten Gender-Regimes befreit und sie wie die Mädchen befähigt, demokratische Geschlechterbeziehungen zu entwickeln. Der Autor diskutiert die vorliegende Forschung über 'Maskulinitäten', die Entwicklung von Jungen und das System der Gender-Materialisierung in der Schule und skizziert im Anschluss daran Empfehlungen für veränderte Gender-Curricula.

Getting boys out of the box

Current debates about boys' education are part of a larger discussion of men, boys and masculinities, which we must understand if we are to act wisely in education. In this article I will provide a brief guide to this debate and the research it has led to, and show how we might use the new knowledge about masculinities and gender construction to understand issues about the school curriculum. In the wake of the Women's Liberation movement, the social position of women was comprehensively debated and the education of girls was brought under special scrutiny. But since gender is a system of social relations, the disturbance and the questioning could not be confined to women and girls. If one term in a relationship is changed, the other term will also change. So the position of men and boys, the nature of masculinity, the gender practices and ideologies that define 'manhood', have also been challenged and have been subject to change. This questioning has occurred on a very wide front. It is worldwide, and it has been conducted from many different points of view – some supporting gender equality and some not. It has also covered a wide range of issues, from men's and boys' health to men's domestic and military violence. Educational issues have naturally been part of the questioning, and there is a wide divergence of opinion about how to understand them. Parents and teachers have been rightly concerned about how to respond to this discussion and what to do in the education of boys, both at home and in the classroom.

It is a troubling feature of the debate about masculinities that the loudest voices in educational matters have been those that describe the success of girls as a threat to boys. A media and political panic has been whipped up about boys' supposed 'failure' in schools, about the supposed 'feminization' of schools, the lack of male 'role models' and the lack of 'boy-friendly' curriculum and pedagogy. Grossly biassed language which is used – like the boys-as-victims rhetoric to justify the abandonment of anti-discrimination law or to introduce gender-segregated scholarships in teacher education – is a warning of the direction in which this neo-conservative push is now heading. The ascendancy of the boys-as-victims discourse has two important consequences for public thinking about education and gender. The first is that this discourse reproduces a drastically simplified – in fact stereotyped – view of men, boys and masculinity. It promotes, to use a necessary piece of academic language, an *essentialist* view of gender – in which men and women are 'naturally' different, not just in their reproductive systems but in their psychology, attitudes, social functions, aspirations, etc. In this view boys are essentially all the same, marked by a „natural" masculinity („boy culture", „deep masculinity", „true manhood", etc.) that produces a distinct set of interests and personality traits and a distinct learning style. This is what I call the 'boys in a box' approach.

The second important consequence is the fostering of the belief that only men can truly understand masculinity. Men

all have it, and women don't. Men appreciate the importance of sport, fighting, competition, emotional control etc., in a way women cannot. Therefore the education of boys can only be properly undertaken by men, acting as role models, mentors, coaches, initiators etc. – displaying the manly attributes of tough love, discipline, physical strength, Zeus energy etc. This provides a fillip for the policy of recruiting more men into primary and early childhood education, which we must applaud. But it provides an even stronger boost for the principle of boys-only classes, programs and schools. These ideas have, in fact, been taken up enthusiastically by the managers of segregated private schools, as a heaven-sent marketing device. 'We are the experts on boys' education', they now claim – so just turn your boys over to us and get out of the way while we turn them into real men. Thus the panic about boys has not only fuelled a diversion of educational resources (in the form of funding for special programs with extremely fuzzy rationales). It has also given a new lease of life to the idea of gender segregation – which is likely to have disastrous long-term effects on gender equity in general, as well as on gender relations in education, and will constrict and distort the education of boys. So we need to get boys out of the box that neo-conservative thinking has thrust them into, and re-ignite the educational imagination.

Some things we know about masculinities

During the last twenty years a considerable body of research has built up about the nature of masculinity and the forms it takes. This research is now found in most parts of the world, it uses a diversity of research methods from large-scale surveys to close-focus ethnographies and life histories, and it has profoundly changed our understanding of masculinity.[2] Perhaps the most important conclusion of this research, given the popularity of the 'boys in a box' approach, is that there is *no single pattern* of masculinity which is found in all cultures and at all periods of history. On the contrary, there is very clear and extensive evidence that there are *multiple* patterns of masculinity. There are multiple definitions of what it means to be a man, and there are diverse ways for men to live in gender relations. This is very clear in the international literature. In the Australian context, it is well shown by studies of Tomsen/Donaldson's (2003), which includes vivid close-focus studies of sexuality, violence, car culture, military masculinities, ethnic minority youth, the masculinity of the very rich, and masculinities in sport. There is diversity of masculinities not only on the large scale across a whole culture, but also in small-scale situations. Single institutions, such as a school or an office, will often have diverse constructions of masculinity within it. For instance, any close examination of gender relations in a school will find different groups of teachers who embody different patterns of masculinity and femininity. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) excellent ethnography of British high school life is a classic example. Such a study will also find groups of boys who are constructing their lives as boys in rather different ways – giving different meanings to what it is to be a boy and a future man. Some place enormous emphasis on toughness and sporting prowess, some on social relations with girls, some on the school curriculum and access to a career. Some are exploring unconventional identities and sexualities, others are displaying their orthodoxy. But it is not the case that these different versions of masculinity are equally available or equally respected. Typically, research finds that in any culture or any institution there is a particular pattern of masculinity which holds the dominant position. This is what I called the case of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995). That term means, in any given setting, the pattern of masculinity which is most honored, which is most associated with authority and power, and which – in the long run – guarantees the collective privilege of men. The existence of a hegemonic masculinity is one reason for the popular illusion that there is only one kind of masculinity. If people focus on the dominant pattern, or the dominant definition of masculinity, they can fail to see the alternative patterns that also exist. But the fact of hegemony is tremendously important for boys growing up. As shown by a recent and very good study of British teenagers (Frosh et al. 2002), the presence of an admired, dominant pattern puts pressure on all boys, whether or not they match the pattern (and most, of course, do not). Masculinities can be studied at different analytical levels. They can be defined at the level of personal life, and at this level we must recognize the importance of embodiment. Masculinities exist as patterns of body-reflexive practice, which we can analyse down to the level of characteristic postures, muscular tensions and specific skills. Masculinities can also be defined at the level of interpersonal interaction, for instance in informal peer group life. A good deal of research now shows that peer group interaction is a particularly salient site for the definition of masculinities in adolescence. Definitions and practices of masculinity are also embedded in institutions and mass culture. A familiar case is the construction of 'hard' masculinities in the organizational culture of armies. Another example is commercial sport, which is now a very important source of images of masculinity for youth. A research finding of key importance is that masculinities do change. The historians have now given us a lot of evidence that constructions of masculinity change over time. There is also survey evidence from contemporary sociology that men's gender attitudes and constructions of masculinity differ between generations. For instance, a national survey of men in Germany, just a few years ago, classified men into four groups according to their gender attitudes: ranging from men who held a modern view of the gender roles of both men and women, called 'new', to those men who held the most conservative views about both men and women, called 'traditional.' The percentage of men holding the most 'traditional' view, in the younger generation, is approximately *half* the percentage in the older generation (Zulehner/Volz 1998). There are similar results, though perhaps not quite so dramatic, in a number of other countries.

The idea that *masculinity itself* might change is particularly upsetting to boys-in-a-box conservatives. Because they think in a rigid binary – boys here, girls there – the only alternative they can imagine to their vision of masculinity is their vision of *femininity*. Therefore the neo-conservative rhetoric about

boys' education is full of accusations – sometimes open, sometimes implied – that schools, women teachers, 'politically correct' policy makers, feminists and other villains are trying to *feminize boys*. And that of course will lead to the end of civilization as we know it. But masculinities do change – in fact they are changing all the time. Men's relationships with women, men's ideologies and attitudes, the division of labour in homes and workplaces, sexual customs, family law, men's relationships with children – none of these are fixed. Indeed there is now a broad popular understanding that these things *can* change, for instance that fathers can have close emotional connections with children, and that women and men should have strictly equal rights in the workplace. (Only a generation ago, neither of these ideas was generally accepted.) These facts should be encouraging for educators, since they mean that educational work about gender relations has a potential for success. But it also has a potential for failure. Gender relations may change for the worse, not for the better – the clock can be turned back, at least in limited ways. We have to consider trends and social forces that go against equality as well as those that support equality.

Some things we know about boys' development

In this section I call attention to four important facts about boys' development that should be borne in mind when we construct educational strategies. First, there is no fixed pathway of development for boys – any more than there is for girls. Development does not consist of the unfolding of a predetermined sequence of events or stages. On the contrary, there are multiple trajectories through childhood and youth – just as there are multiple patterns of masculinity among men. Recent large-scale research on youth, from Lynch/Lodge's (2002) intensive studies of social difference and inequality in Irish secondary schools, to Martino/Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003) phenomenology of Australian teenage boys, very clearly document the multiple trajectories and different experiences of groups of boys. This is important to emphasise, because many of the tactics currently being recommended in boys' education are based on the assumption of a fixed pathway of development. Examples are the ideas that all boys must have conventionally masculine 'role models' in early childhood, or that all boys need plenty of physical movement, or that all boys need to be „initiated' into manhood during adolescence.

Second, boys' development, like girls', involves a tremendous amount of learning in, and about, human relationships. Boys are not sealed capsules of genetic information, as the sociobiologists would have us think. They are growing people who construct their lives through a dense network of relationships, with parents, siblings and other family, with neighbours, with peers, with teachers, with employers, and so on. Intimate, passionate, multi-levelled, sometimes conflictual, the human relationships through which boys develop are both models and starting-points for the patterns of relationship which men will build in adult life. These relationships change over time, in any boy's life, and this is noticeably true of peer relationships, with girls as well as with other boys. A familiar example is a shift, common though not universal, from a focus on same-gender friendships in late childhood and early adolescence to a focus on cross-gender friendships and sexual relations in later adolescence. In giving this illustration I would again warn of the danger of stereotyping, and ignoring the complexity of actual relationships. Unless adults impose segregation, there is never a total separation between boys and girls even in the late primary years. Thorne's (1993) classic school ethnography shows how primary school children move in and out of gender-separated groups, how they cross boundaries, how they play with gender relations, in the course of their social learning in everyday school life.

Third, boys have multiple learning styles. This is very important to recognize, as one of the most influential pseudo-scientific claims in current boys-as-victims discourse is that boys have a 'different' learning style from girls, one that is not supported by schools, and that boys are disadvantaged because 'their' learning style is not permitted. (The usual idea is that boys need a more formal pedagogy with smaller chunks of knowledge, fixed sequences and clear-cut definitions of right and wrong.) This claim is, in my view, an insult to boys. Neither boys nor girls are confined to a single learning strategy or style. On the contrary, boys (except in cases of severe impairment) learn in a variety of ways, and can usually shift from one strategy to another when they need to. Good teachers are aware of this, as part of their professional knowledge, and provide a variety of learning opportunities to allow a range of different forms of learning to occur. One of the problems with the subject curriculum, as discussed below, is that it constricts this strategy on the part of teachers.

Fourth, boys are actively engaged in the construction of masculinities. They are not passive recipients either of messages from the genes, or of 'role' expectations from society. Gender is actively *made* by people in relationships, and this is as true in child development as it is in adult life. Learning involves engagement with what is being learnt, and in many respects the learning and enactment of gender patterns involves high levels of interest on the part of boys. This is a topic that children – whatever their gender identities or trajectories – are often keen to learn about. Gender patterns and gender relations are a common topic of peer group conversation as well as a charged issue in relationships with adults.

An influential school of gender theory (broadly, post-structuralism) speaks of gender as „performance" (Buchbinder 1998) and applied to Australian culture. This takes us part of the way, but there is a risk that we will take 'performance' to imply staginess, insincerity, the wearing of a mask. In fact adolescent boys often do try on various identities and presentations of themselves, as if they were trying on masks, and this may include a variety of gender identities – drawing on femininities as well as masculinities. But much more than a stage performance is going on. The 'performances' have consequences – effects on other people feeding back on understandings of the self, effects on the body, etc. People become committed to certain relationships and particular ways of acting. For this reason I prefer to speak of 'projects' and 'trajectories', to capture the way young people launch themselves

in certain directions in social space, with their later experiences depending, in part, on their earlier moves. The element of time is important, at the level of the individual person as well as the society. We should never settle for a static understanding of gender construction.

How gender is materialized in schools

Since the social space in which much of this development occurs is the school, we need to think carefully about what schools are like as settings for the making of masculinities and femininities. In this, we are assisted by an important development in organization studies, the growth of research and theory about gendered organizations (Acker 1990). Gender is not just a property of individuals, something that people bring into a neutral organizational context. Rather, gender relations are embedded in organizations, in a number of ways:

- in the division of labour (e.g. gendered jobs),
- in power relations (e.g. the nature of authority),
- in emotional relationship (patterns of antagonism and solidarity),
- in organizational cultures (e.g. beliefs about gender difference, equal opportunity etc.).

The arrangement of gender relations that is characteristic of a given organization may be called its 'gender regime'. Gender regimes are multi-dimensional, embracing the four dimensions just noted (a fuller account of these dimensions is given Connell 2002). They are liable to have internal unevennesses and tensions, and they are always subject to change, though specific features of gender arrangements may persist for a surprisingly long time. Schools and education systems are gendered organizations in this sense. Gender patterns in their work and in their effects on children are not accidental and are not an aberration, but are deeply embedded in their histories and current working. Consider, for instance, the current fuss about the lack of male 'role models' in primary schools. There is a long-standing gender imbalance in primary teaching, and even more in early childhood teaching. But this is not going to be fixed by asking more men to show up for primary teaching programs. This would ignore the fact that gender imbalance in primary teaching is part of larger gender division of labour in the education system as a whole – the under-representation of men in kindergartens is matched by the under-representation of women as professors in universities. This in turn is embedded in a division of labour at the level of the whole economy – Australia has one of the most gener-segragated workforces in th d eveloped world – and in a persisting large imbalance between women in domestic work and child care in the family. Dempsey's (1997) detailed study of marital power and domestic labour has shown a bleak picture: Australian men have mostly resisted demands to contribute more domestic work and equalise family relationships. The economic and cultural forces shaping teacher recruitment into primary and early childhood education overwhelm the idea – which most people agree on – that it would be an excellent thing to have gender balance in this part of the workforce. (Indeed, the very federal government that is expressing angst about the lack of male role models in schools is at the same time, by its promotion of the 'traditional family' in other areas of policy, ensuring that the desired change will not happen.)

The gender regimes of schools and education systems do not only involve multiple dimensions of gender, they also involve significant unevenness. There are some parts of a school's life, commonly, where gender is strongly marked, and other parts where gender is very muted. This is important for understanding the school's role in the construction of masculinities. In a previous essay (Connell 2000) I suggested we could identify 'masculinity vortices' in schools. This means areas of school life where processes of masculinity formation are intensely active. Three are particularly noticeable:

- 'Boys' subjects', such as manual arts and technical drawing, which are historically connected with gender-segregated occupations and often taught by men with a background in those occupations.

- School sport, especially competitive team sports such as football which are important in the wider culture as symbols of masculinity – this inevitably filters through into school life.

- The discipline system, especially given the tendency of conflictual discipline to produce hierarchies and exclusions in school life. The old 'prefect' system is a classic example, but is by no means the only one. Ferguson (2000) shows in a very perceptive school ethnography in the United States the key role of school discipline in the development of an oppositional Black masculinity, even at primary school level. At the same time as recognizing areas of school life that are gender-saturated, we should also recognize other areas of school life that are relatively gender-neutral. Teachers may (Thorne 1993) deliberately play down gender in classroom management, for instance by arranging mixed-group seating, or by treating all children in a mixed classroom in common ways. (A familiar example: addressing a class as 'children' rather than 'boys and girls'.) There are occasions when the children themselves will ignore gender boundaries and gender solidarities. The *de-gendering* strategy is not unique to schools. Indeed it is now a familiar strategy in organizational life, used for instance by public sector managers as a way of implementing equal opportunity rules (Connell 2005). Whenever teachers say 'I treat them all as individuals' or 'I don't treat boys and girls differently', they are implicitly adopting a de-gendering approach and may be creating a de-gendered zone of school life. This is not always the best thing to do from an educational point of view, since there are times when we *do* want to make gender an explicit theme of discussion and learning. But it is now a familiar and widespread strategy. The gender regimes of schools may be deliberately

constructed to produce effects on masculinity. Such *masculinity-making agendas* are familiar in educational history. The Arnoldian reforms in ruling-class schools were intended as an agenda of moral education, forming Christian gentlemen, and the later widespread introduction of formalized school sport was also intended to foster a specific pattern of manliness.

Studies of colonial education, most notably Morrell's (2001) brilliant study of settler schools in Natal, in South Africa, show how a whole school system could be constructed around such an agenda. The specific pattern of masculinity these schools installed as hegemonic was the one necessary to sustain the dominance of an elite of white, propertied, patriarchal families in the rough and often violent context of colonialism. But the logic of masculinity-making agendas can be turned in more democratic directions, as brilliantly shown in Denborough's (1996) imaginative program for working with boys to reduce violence.

The organizational patterns of schools and educational systems may also have unintended (or at least un-emphasized) educational consequences. An important case is the different pathways that open up in secondary and post-secondary education, as electives replace the common curriculum that prevailed in primary schooling. Though knowledge would seem to be gender-neutral in principle, in practice the bundles of knowledge that constitute 'subjects' are liable to be gendered in a number of ways. They have gendered histories, they are often tied to gender symbols, they are linked to gender divisions in the economy, they are taught predominantly by men or by women, etc. Once we recognize this, we will not be surprised by the growing gender difference in subject enrolments through secondary school, and the virtual gender segregation in some areas of vocational education. We will also not make the mistake of attributing gender patterns in 'subject choice' to the magic influence of the genes. These differences too are historically produced patterns, they can change over time, and they are connected with the wider patterns in gender relations. At an even more basic level, the school as an institution shapes patterns of masculinity by constituting a social milieu in which hundreds of children or youth are thrown together over long periods. A peer forum is created in which relations between patterns of masculinity are highlighted. In such a setting the issue of hegemony – relations between the dominant pattern of masculinity and subordinate or marginalized patterns – is very likely to become an issue of concern in boys' lives and a source of turbulence in gender relations. For instance, boys in school may struggle for dominance in the local peer group, in the course of which bullying and exclusion can arise. Bullying of boys who are thought to be effeminate or homosexual is a very common source of tension and violence in schools. The struggle for dominance in gender terms among boys and men can also be an important source of educational problems. For instance, especially in working-class communities, there are groups of boys who attempt to claim masculine honor, attempt to claim a leading position in gender terms, but do not have the cultural and institutional resources to do so through academic competition. Such boys are more likely to fall into conflict with the school and sometimes become violent towards other boys or towards teachers. What I have called 'protest masculinity' is a likely result The important study of Lebanese youth in Sydney (Poynting/Noble/Tabar 2003) shows such a pattern arising, in part, as a response to being a target of racism and experiencing social exclusion. Boys following such trajectories may abruptly end their educational careers and go onto the labour market without qualifications and with very weak employment prospects.

The curriculum and gender construction

Recognising the gender regimes of schools and education systems, as just outlined, gives us a way to acknowledge and analyze the gender dimension of curriculum. We can do this without falling into the sweeping generalizations that picture all curriculum as 'men's studies', or all school knowledge as 'feminized'. The contemporary secondary curriculum is broadly divided into a competitive academic subject curriculum, which holds the hegemonic position in the whole education system, and a variety of marginalized curricula, many of which are more practice-based. These two curriculum zones are involved in rather different ways in the formation of masculinities. The competitive academic curriculum – centering on subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, English and history, and languages – is marked by abstraction, by a hierarchical organization of knowledge (graded sequences from elementary to advanced), by sharp boundaries between different areas of knowledge ('subjects'), and by abstract methods of assessment, classically the unseen written examination. The immediate historical origins of this curriculum were the 'classics' as taught in ruling-class boys' boarding schools of the 19th century, and the 'modern' subjects, notably natural sciences and mathematics, that flourished in the day schools provided for the boys of the commercial, industrial and professional middle classes of the same era. Given these origins, when the academic curriculum became the core of a mass secondary system during the twentieth century, it is not surprising that it functioned as a means of class and ethnic exclusion. Working-class youth tended to be under-prepared for it, to be unfamiliar with its techniques and styles (for instance its book-based pedagogies), and to be bored by teaching based on it. The dominance of this form of curriculum thus became one of the forces producing the 'protest masculinity' revolt described above.

Middle-class girls were initially believed to be just as unsuited to the academic curriculum as working-class boys. That was a standard justification for their initial exclusion from universities. Over a long period of time, however, the

academic curriculum was increasingly emphasised in the education of middle-class girls, who – in the face of considerable resistance, including professional segregation and 'marriage bars' – were increasingly able to use it as a path towards employment in professions. (The growth of women's employment as teachers is an important case.) The latest stage of this process, including an upsurge of women's enrolment in universities, has produced the statistics that the boys-as-victims lobby read as signs of boys' educational 'failure' and a school system biassed towards girls. Some professions have, indeed, been colonized by middle-class women. But important forms of social power remain substantially the preserve of men. They include military power, the top levels of the political and judicial system, and most of all, the top levels of corporate management. When we look at ruling-class masculinity, some limits to the influence of the academic curriculum become clear. In past generations, the 'moral' education in elite boys' schools – through sports, conventional religion and the prefect system – was at least as important as academic curriculum in shaping ruling-class masculinities. In the contemporary era of corporate globalization, ruling-class masculinities have to be modernized – muscular Christianity is no longer relevant. But this has not been done by an abstracted academic curriculum. It is the decidedly non-academic approach of the MBA, based on case studies and problem-solving exercises, that has become the dominant model of management education. Alongside the academic curriculum in the secondary schools are a number of other fields of teaching and learning. They have different histories and different relations to the academic curriculum. In some, there is a continuing process of assimilation to the academic subject model, in others there is a conscious attempt to maintain a different pedagogy, and in others, both processes occur at the same time. (Vocational courses in the revised Higher School Certificate in NSW (North South Wales) are a striking example – some of these courses exist in two forms, according to whether students want to count them towards a matriculation score or not.)

In physical education there is a long tradition of practice-based non-academic pedagogy, going back to military training and 'Swedish drill' as well as competitive sports. This is an area where gender divisions have been strong, as particular physical performances and particular games were culturally defined as masculine or feminine. Physical education in schools is part of the regulation and disciplining of bodies which post-structuralist research has shown to be important in the construction of gender. Indeed these physical performances have often come to be seen as emblematic of gender itself. Thus sports that involve a certain level of physical confrontation and (legal) violence are seen as tests of manhood – football codes, boxing and ice hockey being the most visible – and often become implicated in the definition of hegemonic masculinities in schools and the subordination of other masculinities. Being a coach or trainer in such sports is not an activity with high professional status among teachers, but the people who do it may become influential local figures in disseminating ideologies of masculinity. Not because of their alignment with the hegemonic curriculum but, in a way, because of their distance from it. This is a good example of the tensions within dominant constructions of masculinity, which should warn us against assuming hegemonic masculinities are simple and smoothly reproduced. In vocational training there are also curricula that centre on bodily practices, such as woodworking or cooking skills. These were once gender-segregated and are often still strongly gendered, in terms of who teaches them, what is presupposed, and which students take them. (For instance building studies in school, which presuppose knowing how to use a hammer and a wrench, are mostly taken by boys, while childhood studies are mostly taken by girls.) Vocational courses of this kind are obviously linked to gender divisions of labour in the economy and in families, and tend to reproduce those divisions. This has been partly changed by curriculum reforms. Some changes in practical curricula have merged areas of knowledge, sometimes blurring gender boundaries. Other changes have linked practical learning to more academic knowledge which is sometimes (though not always) more gender-neutral. Thus the cooking skills tend to be taught alongside studies of nutrition, the craft skills alongside materials science etc. Creative and performing arts have a different history and a different position in the curriculum. These are sometimes very high-status activities – the consumption of classical music, live drama and visual art is a striking feature of elite culture in modern capitalism. But they are also curiously gendered – men being the main professional producers, affluent women the main consumers, of 'the arts'. Creative and performing arts at a *non-professional* level have been a central feature of elite girls' education for a very long time, being considered ladylike accomplishments, while occupying a very marginal position in elite boys' education. In working-class education, the arts were long seen as irrelevant, little more than a costly frill, though skilful teachers could do striking things with bands and with drama in working-class schools (e.g. *Acting Together*, an early example of student-made theatre reflecting on social justice). There has also been an age structuring of arts learning. Painting, singing, drama, instrumental performance etc. in simplified forms have long been very prominent in early childhood education (where most teachers are women). Their place in the school program then shrinks through the primary years as the competitive academic curriculum cuts in. In the secondary school, creative and performing arts are practically reduced to options, and they are options mainly taken by girls. This is deeply regrettable, because the arts are an important vehicle for emotional education, and emotional patterns are a key dimension of gender. Boys grappling with problems of changing gender relations and identities will find drama, for instance, an important resource – but boys are mostly absent from drama classes. The splits in the secondary and post-secondary curriculum that result in boys and young men being mostly absent from the arenas where emotions and human relations are being considered are, to my mind, one of the greatest contemporary educational problems created by gender relations. This is a much greater problem than the supposed (and mostly mythical) 'failure' of boys in the competitive academic curriculum.

Principles for better practice

It is important not only to be able to describe patterns and analyze situations, not only to come up with proposals for classroom practice, but also to think about the principles that should govern practice. I want to suggest three broad principles about curriculum that arise from reflection on boys' educational needs. The first is that, in general, curricula should be designed for gender inclusiveness. One of the most telling critiques of old-style patriarchal education was that its content was drawn from the lives of men and boys and excluded the experience of women and girls. This has been partly rectified, though there is still a way to go; a glance at History curricula, for instance, will still often find a mass of stories about elite men, punctuated with an occasional special section about women, rather than a genuinely inclusive history. *Boys need to learn about the experiences of women as much as they need to learn about the experiences of men* – we don't live in a world of 'separate spheres'. We must remember that gender is relational, that women are as much involved in the formation of masculinities as men are, and that an education that segregates experience is a crippled education. It is important that the experience of men and boys should also be treated inclusively – the varieties of masculinities define a richness of masculine experience that is an important curriculum resource.

Second, we should value gender explicitness in content. Gender is itself an important curriculum theme, simply because gender relations are such an important aspect of human social life. This is a topic of considerable interest, sometimes burning interest, to boys as well as girls. Boys need occasions for learning about, debating, and reflecting on gender relations both in their own lives and in the wider society – and in other societies. The occasions go far beyond 'personal development' lessons, because gender relations themselves are so pervasive. This is a relevant theme in vocational studies, in literature and language, in drama, music and visual arts – and also in biology, in mathematics, in technology studies, indeed across the curriculum as a whole.

Third, we should consider the values and goals that are embedded in curriculum related to gender. To my mind, the most useful framework for this is the idea of *education for democracy*. Gender relations are not problematic as such – any culture needs a way of dealing socially with the reproductive distinction between human bodies – but gender relations are problematic when they take toxic forms. Specifically, gender relations are problematic to the extent they are undemocratic – that is, marked by power imbalances, exclusions, exploitation, violence, oppression or inequality.

The central goal of gender education, I would argue, is to equip boys and girls with the resources, skills, knowledges and values they will need to create democratic gender relations in their own lives and in the culture at large. This is certainly a large task; it requires substantial information from natural and social sciences, it requires the development of skills (including personal reflection, relationship skills, capacities for arguing from evidence, etc.), it requires the development of creative capacities, and so forth. Given the absence of boys and young men from important curriculum areas, some structural change seems to be needed too. There is plenty of work for curriculum designers, as well as classroom teachers, to do!

Annotations

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2 An up-to-date survey of the international literature can be found in Kimmel/Hearn/Connell 2005.

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